



HFC *on* MEDIA

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During the week of January 20, 2008 a team from Harpers Ferry Center traveled to San Juan National Historic Site, Puerto Rico to assist the park with the installation of a series of new signs. The park is the first to complete the design, fabrication, and installation of a parkwide sign plan. Learn more about the new signs starting on page 2. (NPS Photo by Bob Clark)

From HFC's Director

If your park is contemplating a new exhibit, take a moment to read our article on the new Barrier Island Visitor Center exhibits at Assateague Island (page 4). Park staff and staff from Harpers Ferry Center have been working closely on the planning, design, and production of a multisensory exhibit experience that will engage a broad audience of repeat visitors, school groups, and visitors who focus on recreation instead of the park's interpretive stories.

What strikes me is the depth of planning, research, and thinking the park has invested in this project. It's clear that planning, designing, and producing a new exhibit is very challenging and complex work. It requires an enormous amount of time and energy from all involved. If you're not convinced of this, read the sidebar on HFC's new exhibit development process (page 5).

Designing and developing a successful exhibit is a highly collaborative process. Park interpretive/education staff and subject matter experts must work closely with exhibit planners, designers, and fabricators to produce successful exhibits. It's clearly a team effort, and HFC looks forward to being a part of that team, helping parks understand the processes and contributing our resources to facilitate successful exhibits.

—Don Kodak

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New Signs for San Juan NHS

Park Completes Installation of Parkwide Sign Plan

During the week of January 20, 2008 a team from Harpers Ferry Center traveled to San Juan National Historic Site, Puerto Rico to assist the park with the installation of a series of new signs. The work was the manifestation of a comprehensive sign plan that was previously developed by the park and HFC.

The plan included language, graphic layouts, and locations for a wide range of signs that help visitors move about the forts and other historic sites in the park. All the signs include English and Spanish text, and were designed to be free standing rather than attached to the historic structures. The parkwide plan will now serve as a sign inventory, helping the park manage its investment and to replace signs when required.

Since the beginning of the NPS Sign Program, parks have been encouraged to take a comprehensive approach to sign

planning: to prepare a parkwide plan that defines how signs will be used to communicate with park visitors rather than purchasing signs randomly. Many parks have begun to create such plans. Comprehensive sign plans have been completed or are underway for major areas within many parks, or for some entire parks. Until now, however, no park has completed the design, fabrication, and installation of a parkwide sign plan.

The plan that was prepared for San Juan NHS included a broad range of sign types. Road guide signs were designed to



The primary site identity sign, which is made of wood over a steel support structure, is consistent with NPS Identity standards, but was modified to include the World Heritage Site designation.

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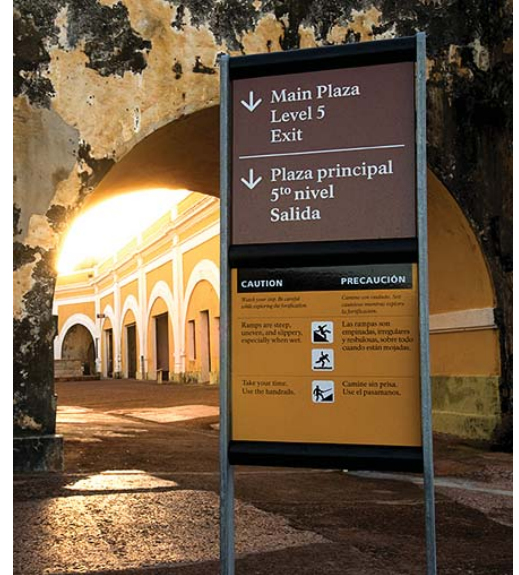
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Bases for the park's identity signs were designed to reflect, but not mimic, the historic architecture of the two forts at San Juan National Historic Site. Since the beginning of the NPS Sign Program, parks have been encouraged to take a comprehensive approach to sign planning.



direct motorists to various features within the park. Other signs were designed to identify those features and designate them as national park sites. Still other signs were designed to provide information about safety, resource protection, pedestrian wayfinding, daily events, and interpretation. In all, more than 500 sign panels were created and posted in 120 different locations.

For most of the signs, the park chose porcelain enamel for the sign panels and galvanized steel for the sign support structures. Both materials are exceptionally durable and require minimal maintenance.



(All Photos by Bob Clark)

To learn more about the NPS Sign Program – including how to initiate a sign plan – visit www.hfc.nps.gov/uniguide or contact program manager Bob Clark (phone: 304-535-5022; e-mail: Robert_H_Clark@nps.gov).

Barrier Island Visitor Center

New Exhibits Take Shape for Assateague Island

"Island of Renewal" has emerged as the title and overall theme of the new Barrier Island Visitor Center exhibits at Assateague Island National Seashore. As planning and design enters the final stages for the park's new exhibits, the story of how this title was selected, and how the exhibit designs have evolved, illustrates the value and importance of Harpers Ferry Center's new exhibit development process.

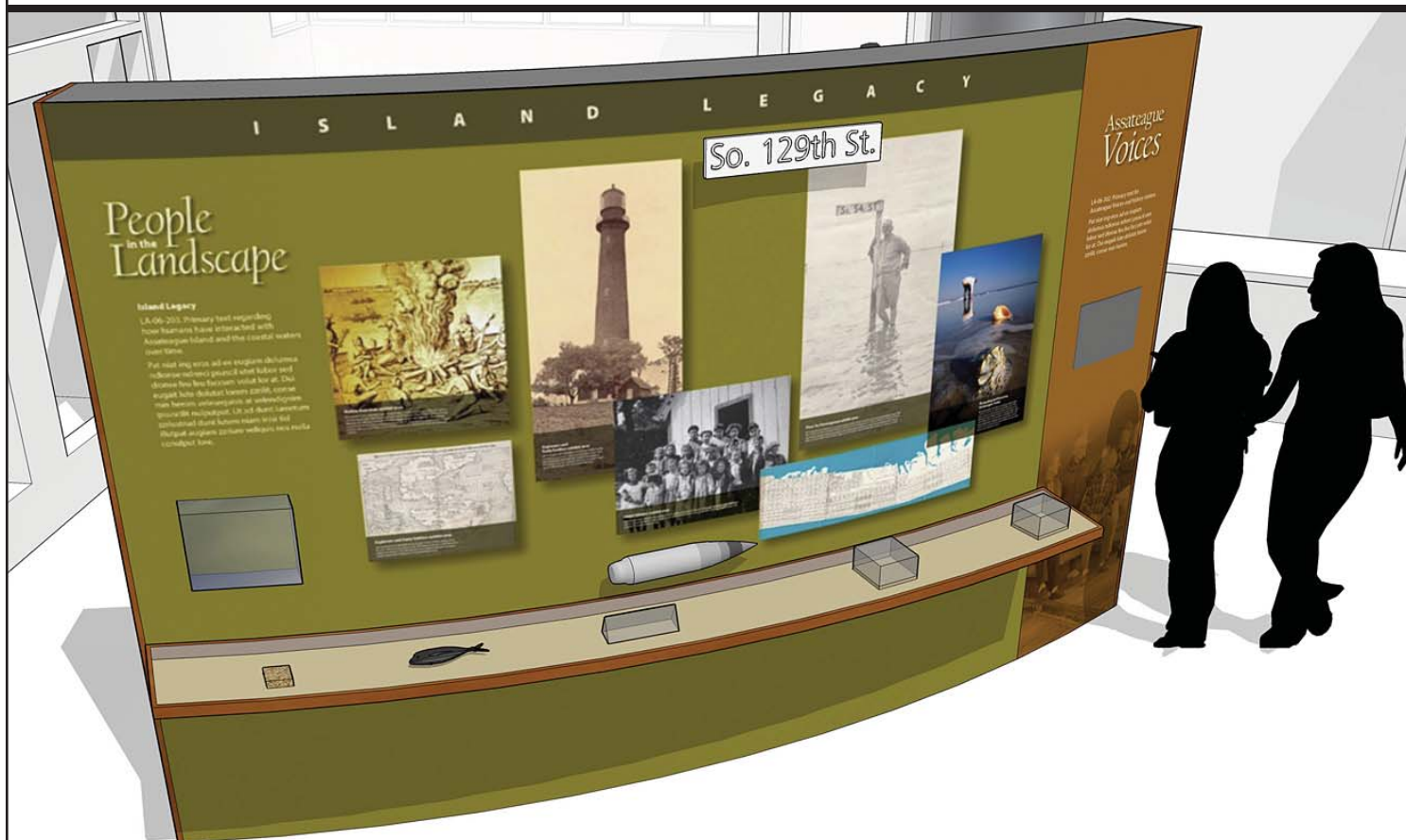
"There will always be push and pull with a project of this scope and importance," says Rachelle Daigneault, Chief of Interpretation & Education at Assateague Island National Seashore. "But the result of this back and forth discussion will always be better, and our own exhibits will really benefit from it." Daigneault is referring to the numerous meetings and teleconferences between park staff and staff at Harpers Ferry Center who are involved in this new visitor center and exhibit project. She credits great collaboration between

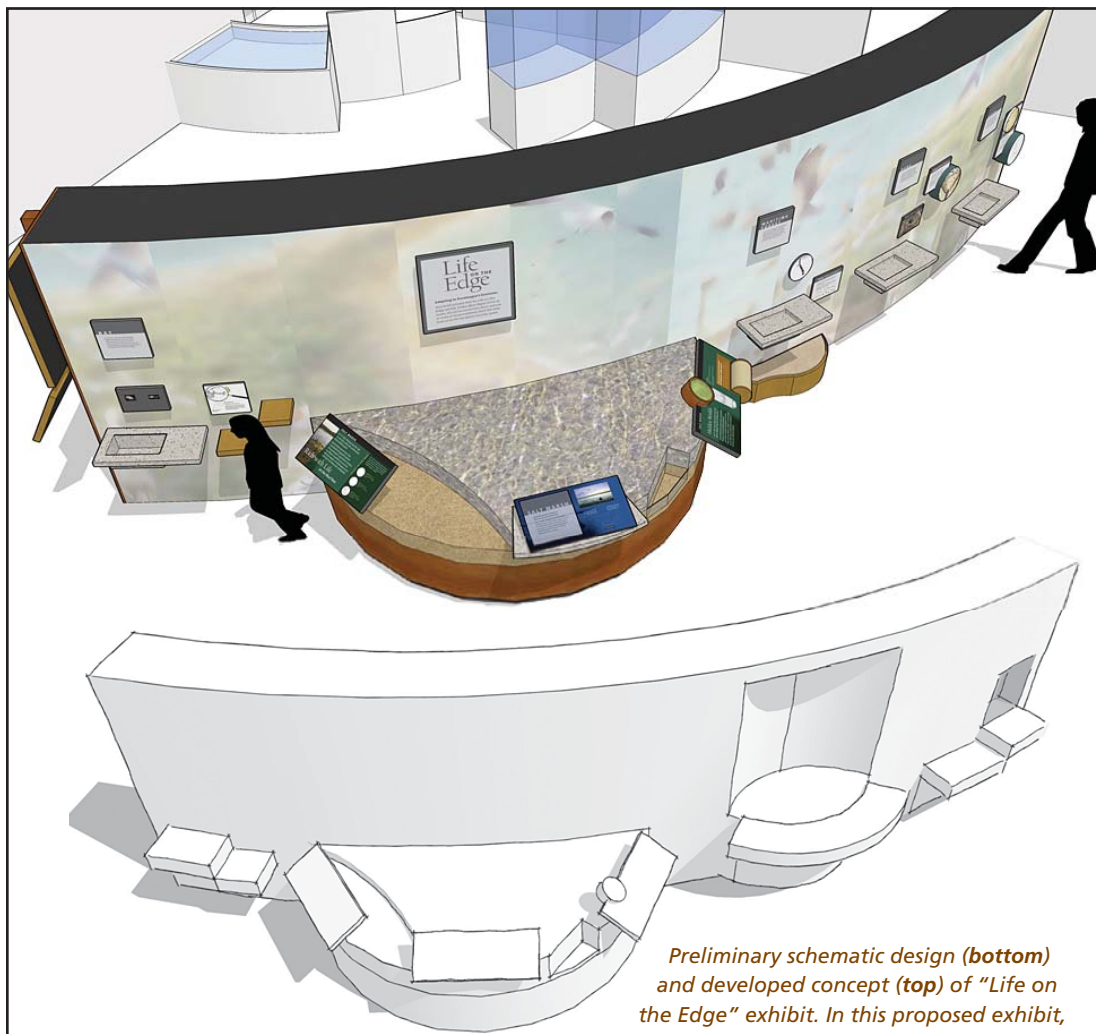
the park's subject matter experts and HFC's planning and design experts with much of the project's success so far.

Daigneault also recognizes the key role of HFC project manager Justin Radford. "Justin has really helped us stay on track, and helps us understand many of the details of planning a major exhibit." Simply put, she doesn't know how else she could keep track of everything that's going on and still do her job at the park.

Below: Three dimensional exhibit designs are incorporated into HFC planning documents to help team members better visualize various exhibit options.

This proposed exhibit displays a chronology of images and objects—some tactile—that represent the history of human interaction with Assateague Island. Visitors can also listen to oral histories, experiencing both the content and the distinctive accents from the area.





Preliminary schematic design (bottom) and developed concept (top) of "Life on the Edge" exhibit. In this proposed exhibit, visitors can stand back and see the entire spectrum of habitats in one view, and then move in closer for habitat-specific interpretation.

Pre-Design

HFC's pre-design proposal for the new Barrier Island Visitor Center exhibits was based on an April 2006 charrette conducted with park interpretive staff and an exhibit planning and design team from Harpers Ferry Center. The proposal also drew from the park's Long Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) and a park document titled "Barrier Island Visitor Center: Creating a Sense of Place."

The key topics and themes identified in the park's LRIP include:

- Barrier Island Dynamics: Assateague Island is on the move, ever changing, constantly being reshaped. The transitional nature of the island is what makes the dynamics of life on Assateague so vibrant.
- The Ocean and the Coastal Bays of Assateague: The waters of the bay and

ocean mix around Assateague, creating a virtual soup of life. This confluence rejuvenates life daily, both above and beneath the waters.

- The Human History of Assateague: People have been a part of the natural systems of Assateague for centuries, sometimes for survival, sometimes for enjoyment. Those who have spent time on and around the island have changed it and have been changed by it.

Schematic Design

Adhering to an exhibit planning, design, and production process developed by Harpers Ferry Center over the last three years (*see adjacent sidebar*), exhibit planner Neil Mackay and designer Chris Dearing developed a schematic exhibit plan (*Schematic I Proposal*, April 2007).

HFC's New Exhibit Development Process

Recognizing inconsistencies in how different exhibit planning, design, and production projects have proceeded over the past several years, Harpers Ferry Center has adopted new processes to bring consistency and accountability to exhibit development.

Looking back over the past few years, senior exhibit designer Don Branch recalls that "too many critical tasks were falling through the cracks. Efficient exhibit development was becoming the exception rather than the rule." So three years ago, Branch began asking exhibit contractors and museum professionals about their own exhibit development processes. Other organizations, he soon learned, were having the same problems HFC was.

"One of the key problems we had in the past," according to Branch, "was aligning our own schedules for exhibit development with Denver Service Center's architectural engineering process." Because the design and construction of new visitor centers directly affected the planning, design, and production of new exhibits, close communication between DSC and HFC was critical, but often imperfect, according to Branch.

Another factor in recent years has been the dramatic transformation in how exhibits are planned, designed, and built. Computer graphic programs and databases for tracking schedules, graphics, and artifacts are now common components of modern day exhibit development. Identifying ways to better organize the complex steps of exhibit development, and track a process where contractors, subcontractors, park staff, and Harpers Ferry Center staff all play an important role, was recognized as a critical element in managing a successful exhibit project.

While exhibit development and architectural design and engineering processes share some



This proposed map provides visitors with orientation to the entire park and its surrounding area in one comprehensive view. Panels along the map edge provide examples of the many experiences that are possible during a visit.

This schematic proposal incorporated the previous interpretive planning and pre-design work, a visitor survey conducted in 2006 by the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands, and an exhibit development workshop held at the park in February 2007. The 2007 workshop included an examination of the park's artifact, specimen, and graphic collection.

Key elements of the schematic proposal were the park's overall interpretive themes, the audiences the park wanted the exhibits designed for, the project's goals, and the exhibit design criteria. The proposal also provided three alternative schemes for organizing both the interpretive content and the physical layout of the exhibits.

Assateague Island staff identified three audiences in particular for their visitor center exhibits:

- Repeat visitors—many of whom come back to the island and the visitor center year after year.
- School groups—may increase with new interpretive media offerings at the visitor center.
- Potential audiences not currently utilizing the visitor center—such as visitors who focus on recreation, and those who do not visit the park.

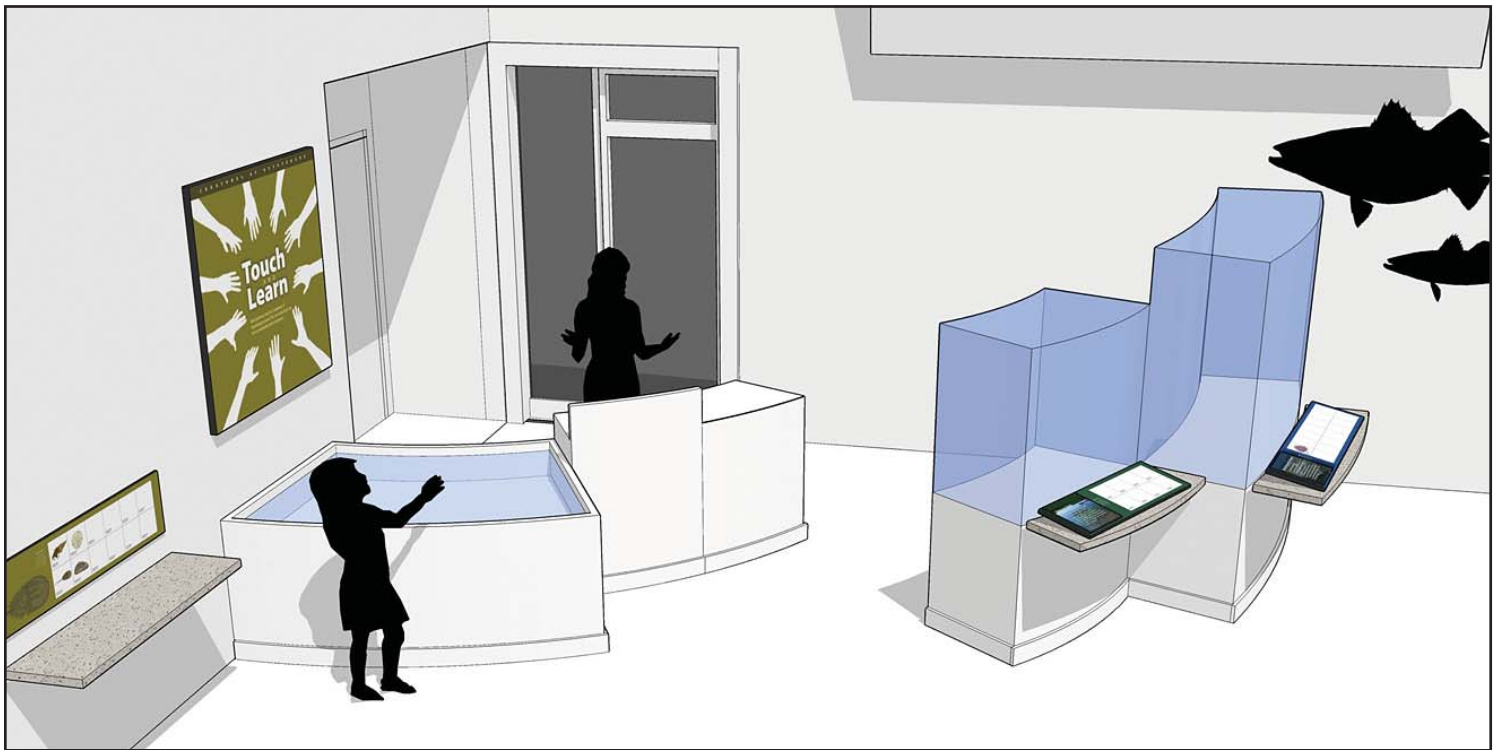
The park also identified five distinct goals for the exhibition:

- Create opportunities for visitors to discover meanings, connections, and insights.
- Inspire and motivate visitors to directly, safely, and appropriately experience the park.
- Provide basic orientation to Assateague Island and the many visitor experiences available.

common elements—space planning, three-dimensional design, and lighting to name a few—the primary purpose of an exhibit is to tell a story. Content development steps such as research, writing text, collecting images, developing graphics, selecting objects, and creating audiovisual and interactive components are usually the most time consuming and complex parts of the process.

So Branch and a team of other exhibit specialists at HFC developed a comprehensive exhibit development process from the ground up. It mirrors Denver Service Center's architectural phasing process to ensure clearer communication between DSC and HFC. It incorporates the National Park Service Value Analysis process that encourages a careful review of different exhibit options and greater accountability for money spent on large exhibit projects. It also accounts for contractors who may be tasked with all or part of any given exhibit project. Finally, it updates and expands on HFC's own planning, design, and production specifications that have evolved since the Center was founded in 1970.

To retrieve a copy of the "Museum & Visitor Center Exhibit Planning, Design, and Production Process" (March 2008), visit the **Exhibits In-Depth** page on the Harpers Ferry Center website at www.nps.gov/hfcl/products/exhibits/ex-indepth.htm. HFC has also developed a companion document titled "Museum & Visitor Center Exhibit Design/Build Process" (March 2008) specifically for use with forthcoming design/build IDIQ contracts.



- Instill a sense of stewardship and an ethic of care.
- Be a resource for the community, partners, and stakeholders.

Design criteria included a broad range of topics, including comprehensive visitor accessibility, durability in the face of the harsh coastal environment, coordination with the building's architecture, exhibits that are appropriate to a range of learning styles that incorporate tactile and interactive elements, and exhibits that closely complement the personal services provided by park staff. According to HFC's Neil Mackay and Chris Dearing, this last criteria is unusual in park visitor centers. Typically, exhibits are designed to stand alone. But park staff felt very strongly that the media—especially the new aquaria—must interrelate with their interpretive talks and public programs.

Finally, *Schematic I* proposed three alternative exhibit schemes:

- Rhythms of Change: Letting Nature Shape Assateague – this theme focused on barrier island dynamics or geomorphology.

- Island of Connections: Assateague Journeys – this theme was habitat-based, focusing on wildlife and people.
- Hidden Worlds: Adapting to Assateague's Diverse and Extreme Habitats – what can we show in an exhibit that people typically don't see during a visit?

A second follow-up schematic plan (*Schematic II Proposal*, August 2007) incorporated input from a thorough review and discussion of the initial alternatives. The most effective elements from the three alternative exhibit schemes were blended into a new scheme—Island of Renewal. Exhibit stories were refined and fleshed out in more detail. More detailed exhibit designs were also incorporated into the plan. Says Daigneault, "HFC's schematic drawings made it so much easier to understand the exhibit plans. Their design expertise really helped us understand what we were looking at."

Design Development

The *Design Development I Plan* followed in February 2008. At this stage in the exhibit development process, all the major elements were accounted for,

The Aquaria exhibit area provides tools and props for interpreters presenting aquaria programs. The area includes a touch tank which offers opportunities for appropriate visitor interaction with saltwater creatures. Supporting exhibits allow visitors to look at life forms in the tanks, and then obtain associated identification, information, and interpretation on their own.

more detailed exhibit designs and text content were integrated into the plan, and media elements requiring further development—such as interactive kiosks or touchable exhibits—were fully described.

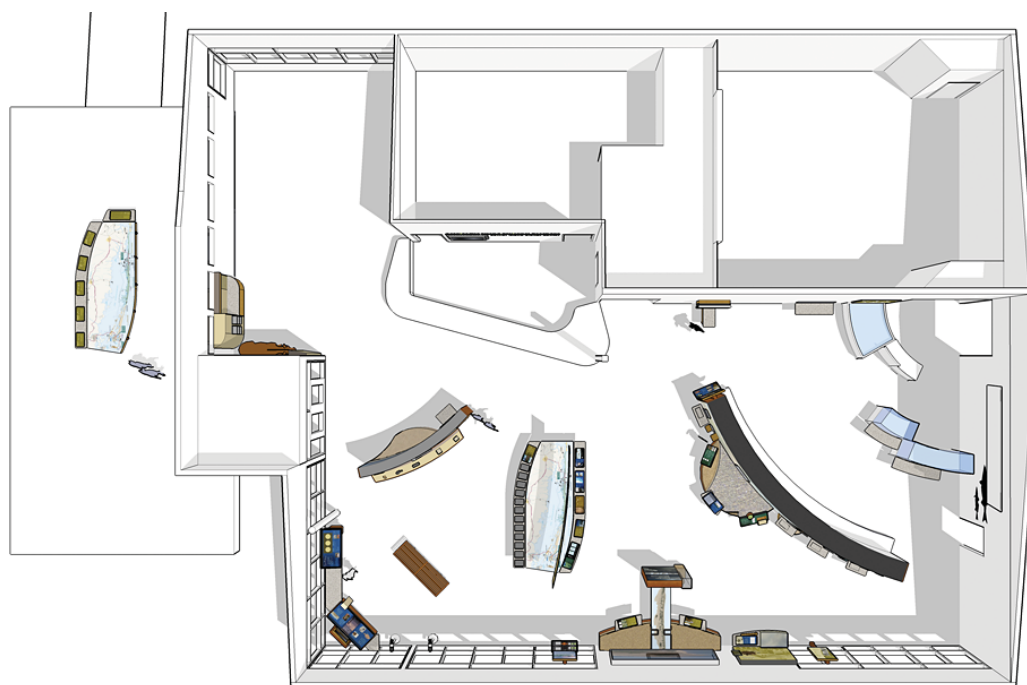
Additional design criteria discussed and developed during the schematic phase were also added to the plan. These included:

- Incorporate changeable/updateable elements into the exhibition to allow park staff to provide new information to visitors (for example, showing changes to the island's shape, interpreting scientific research efforts, and presenting new perspectives on resource issues).
- Provide seating in the primary exhibition space for visitors to rest while appreciating views out the windows, and to watch children under their care who are using the exhibits.
- Provide opportunities to enhance the exhibits with teaching aids and other curriculum-based learning tools (for example, include storage areas within exhibit areas for interpreters and teach-

ers to access props related to the interpretation presented).

As of March 2008, the park is reviewing the *Design Development I Plan*. Once all the park's comments, corrections, and revisions are gathered, Harpers Ferry Center will produce a *Design Development II Plan* that develops all the exhibit content in still greater detail. This will be followed by the creation of production documents and technical drawings for use in an exhibit fabrication scope of work, and the subsequent selection of an exhibit fabrication contractor. The park hopes to open the new Barrier Island Visitor Center in the summer of 2009.

Harpers Ferry Center staff who are working on this project include Justin Radford (Project Manager), Sherry Sturman (Project Specialist), Neil Mackay (Exhibit Planner), Chris Dearing (Exhibit Designer), Anne Tubiolo (AV Director/Producer), Paul Koehler (Exhibit Producer), Warren Duke (AV Technician), and Pat Lovett (Graphics Acquisition).



Proposed exhibit floorplan for the new Barrier Island Visitor Center.

Retirees

Jack Spinnler

Harpers Ferry Center interpretive planner Jack Spinnler retired on February 29, 2008 after more than 32 years with the National Park Service.



Jack started his association with the NPS as a student intern at C&O Canal National Historical Park during the summer of 1975. At the time, he was finishing his B.S. degree from the University of Maryland in Outdoor Recreation (with a minor in elementary education).

Jack's first paid position with the NPS was as a park technician in 1976-77 for White House Liaison-President's Park. During those years, he was part of the NPS team that set up the first timed-tour ticket system for White House tours.

In 1978 he was accepted into the NPS Ranger Intake Program and assigned as a park ranger at Whitman Mission National Historic Site. In 1979, he transferred to Edison National Historic Site as their chief of interpretation and protection.

In 1981, while at Edison, Jack organized seasonal interpretive training courses with the other NPS areas in the greater New York City area, and developed one of the first interpretive skills teams. Using that model, Mather Training Center established the NPS Interpretive Skills training program in 1982 that directed interpretive training in the NPS through the 1980s. Jack was an interpretive skills instructor

U.S. Access Board Features HFC Accessibility Guidelines

The following article, which features Harpers Ferry Center's *Programmatic Accessibility Guidelines for National Park Service Interpretive Media*, appeared in the January/February 2008 issue of *Access Currents*, the bimonthly newsletter of the U.S. Access Board.

NPS's Harpers Ferry Center: A Leading Resource on Exhibit Access

The National Park Service's Harpers Ferry Center, which oversees interpretive media for national parks, recently released updated guidelines for accessible exhibits and other media. The "Programmatic Accessibility Guidelines for National Park Service Interpretive Media" outline best practices for providing access to exhibits, artifacts, audio visual programs and tours, signage, and publications. While developed for national parks, the guidelines can be consulted in designing exhibits and visitor information at other sites.

The Center has refined and validated its best practices through various initiatives

and review panels. Last September the Center organized a workshop on exhibit designs for C&O Canal visitor sites in the Washington, D.C. area. The event, which included participants from the Board, featured a review of plans and designs for new exhibits at two sites and solicited recommendations from invited panelists on access enhancements. Input was received on exhibit lighting, tactile models and panels, exhibit text, assistive audio, and planning, among others. Participants also reviewed large print park brochures and prototype tactile maps and exhibit panels developed by the Center. Additional information, including the updated guidelines, is available on the Center's website at www.nps.gov/hfc/accessibility/.

from 1982 through 1989. He has presented numerous training sessions at Mather and Albright training centers throughout his career, and presented training sessions at a number of NAI National Interpreter Workshops.

In 1985, Jack transferred to Clara Barton National Historic Site as site manager. In 1987, he transferred to the National Capital Region's Office of Interpretation as an interpretive planner before coming to Harpers Ferry Center in 1988.

During Jack's first nine years at HFC—from 1988 to 1997—he was a wayside exhibit planner. Jack planned more than 500 wayside exhibits for more than 30 NPS units. In 1997,

Jack became an interpretive planner, serving as team captain on more than 30 long-range interpretive planning efforts. He has been the interpretive planner on general management planning efforts, served as project manager for media efforts at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park and Missouri National Recreational River, and planned media rehab projects at Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Alaska's Transportation Hubs.

Jack received the Regional Freeman Tilden Award in 1984 for the North Atlantic Region. He also received a Unit Award for Excellence of Service in 1983 for his work on Interpretive Skills Teams. At HFC, he received a 1995 Superior Performance Award for developing a wayside exhibits manual for the Long Distance Trails of the National Park System, a 2001 Performance Award for helping to establish HFC's Interpretive Media Institute, and a 2005 Performance Award for his training efforts and excellence in interpretive planning.

Jack and his wife Anne plan to stay in Frederick, Maryland. Jack plans to lead tours of Orioles Park at Camden Yards for the Baltimore Orioles, and lead tours of Frederick's historic district.



CURRENT NEWS FROM THE UNITED STATES ACCESS BOARD

ACCESS CURRENTS

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TEITAC to Present its Report on the 508 Standards in April

The Telecommunications and Electronic and Information Technology Advisory Committee (TEITAC) will deliver its report to the Board on April 3, 2008. The report will include recommendations on updating the Board's Section 508 standards for electronic and information technology and its guidelines for telecommunications products covered by Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act. The Committee's presentation is scheduled for 3:00 at the Grand Hyatt in downtown Washington, D.C. and will be followed by a reception.

At the Committee's last meeting, which took place January 7 - 9, members continued their review of the recommendations prepared to date and sought consensus on remaining issues. In addition to recommendations on the substance of provisions, the Committee also addressed revisions to the organization and structure of the standards that take into account the continuously evolving nature of the technologies covered. The Committee's report will be the basis for the Board's first update of the Section 508 standards since their original publication in 2000. The Board will review the Committee recommendations and issue an update proposal which will be available for public comment.

The Committee is continuing its discussions by weekly teleconferences every Tuesday from 1:00 - 4:00 (Eastern). For further information on the Committee's conference calls or its presentation to the Board, visit the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/sec508/update-index.htm, the committee's website at <http://teitac.org/>, or contact Tim Creagan at creagan@access-board.gov (202) 277-0016.

TEITAC Presentation
April 3, 2008
3:00 - 6:00
Reception
6:00 - 7:30
The Grand Hyatt
1000 H Street, N.W.